

## News Release

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## COMMISSIONERS REPORT ON THE STATE OF FREDERICK COUNTY

FREDERICK, MD – The Frederick Board of County Commissioners today presented the citizens with a comprehensive report on the <u>state of the county</u> in commemoration of the board's three-year anniversary since taking office. The strategic goals approved at the beginning of the board's term continue to set the stage for actions in areas highlighted in the report.

Board President Blaine Young said, "This year's state of the county presentation provides a snapshot in time of where we stand today. In spite of continuing challenges to the economy, Frederick County is addressing the structural deficit and long-term fiscal challenges, yearly county income has increased, total employment has increased, unemployment continues to remain under six percent, new housing demands have increased, and school construction projects have been moved up in the funding process.

"We are making good progress and heading in the right direction as far as budget, jobs, public-private partnerships, public safety, agricultural preservation, land use, housing, transportation and many other areas. We have made many tough decisions over the years, because we were determined to live within our means and that is now the norm for Frederick County Government.

"Frederick County is on stable, healthy ground. Compared with other jurisdictions, we're in a position of stability with regard to our bond rating, our retirement fund and other post employment benefits. Our accomplishments over the last year have much to do with our cooperative relationship with our municipalities and the business community. We have made our point that we are 'open for business' in Frederick County.

"We would like to thank County Manager Lori Depies, our outstanding division directors and all the employees for their hard work in serving the citizens of Frederick County."

The complete report on the <u>state of the county</u> is available on the Board of County Commissioners' webpage at <u>www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/bocc</u>.

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## Highlights of the report include:

- Information on demographics, the economy, jobs (the upside and downside) and housing permits.
- <u>Business-friendly improvements</u>: development of 265 <u>action items</u> with over 83 percent completed.
- <u>Agricultural Preservation Program</u> Frederick County has preserved 49,207 agricultural acres and another 16,503 acres on 107 easements through the Installment Purchase Program.
- Updates on property taxes, income taxes, recordation taxes and investment income. Taxpayer relief initiatives reduced or eliminated over 200 fees associated with doing business with Frederick County.
- <u>Education initiatives</u> Restoration of \$1 million in funding for Frederick Community College, no cuts to K-12 funding and an additional \$747 million for the state shift of teachers pension.
- <u>County employee initiatives</u> merit step and cost of living adjustment for the first time in four years in FY2013, FY2014 and budgeted in FY2015. Continued reduction and restructuring of county workforce. Space consolidation and placement of surplus property for sale and back on tax rolls.
- A comparison of past budgets and a look at the fiscal integrity of Frederick County, which saw
  an improvement in its bond rating due to the board's commitment to address structural
  imbalances through expenditure cuts without material reliance on one-time resources.
- Charts that compare taxes by jurisdiction.
- A report on the county's premier <u>public school system</u>: <u>Frederick County Public Schools</u> had the state's fourth highest graduation rate at 92.8 percent and the second lowest dropout rate at 3.6 percent; SAT scores continue to surpass state and national scores, and *Newsweek* again noted all of the county's high schools on its list of America's Best High Schools.
- <u>Public safety</u> <u>fire and rescue</u> responded to 49,755 calls in FY2013 and the county continues to maintain a strong career and volunteer base of dedicated personnel.
- <u>Public safety</u> The crime rate per capita (per 100 people) in Frederick County is less than one-half the national average. However, the overall reduction in the number of Maryland State Police troopers assigned to Frederick County and their diminishing law enforcement role locally will require the <a href="Sheriff"s Office">Sheriff"s Office</a> to increase the authorized number of sworn deputies to maintain the current level of law enforcement services.

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- The Sheriff's Office is the only agency in Maryland that partners with the Department of Homeland Security / Immigration and Customs Enforcement and participates in the 287(g) program, which has resulted in 1,226 detainers lodged on criminal aliens since the program's inception.
- Parks & Recreation Division maintained 18 developed parks and 2,066 acres of park land, which were enjoyed by over 1.8 million estimated visitors in FY2013. In 2014 the county will open a synthetic turf multi-purpose field in Ballenger Creek Park.
- <u>Animal Control</u> reports on intake, adoption, rescue and total calls of over 10,000 during FY2013.
- The <u>Interagency Information Technologies Division</u> reported on increased FCG-TV/video streaming public outreach and expanded credit and/or debit card payment options in partnership with the Department of Treasury through the "<u>donate now</u>" option on the county website.
- <u>Health Services</u> reported that the county moved to third best in Maryland for Health Outcomes; the department received a score of 100 percent from the Centers for Disease Control upon review of the plan for dispensing medications in a biological emergency; provided outpatient mental health and additional treatment services; it educated approximately 9,000 residents about cancer prevention; school health staff managed over 320,000 health room visits and the Scott Key Center continued to provide employment assistance for those with disabilities.
- <u>Citizens Services</u>: 912 employers have become part of the <u>Workforce Services</u> "FrederickWORKS! One Job at a Time" initiative, representing the creation or filling of 2,115 jobs in the county; the <u>Department of Aging</u> completed a needs assessment that outlines strengths, recommendations and strategies to meet gaps in service and unmet needs of seniors, and the <u>Department of Housing</u> established Maryland's first Land Trust to recreate a permanent supply of affordable workforce housing (assistance provided by a Neighborhood Conservation Initiative grant and partnership with the Frederick County Habitat for Humanity, Inc.).
- <u>Citizens Services</u>: A new Housing Initiative Fund provides emergency sheltering assistance to the Religious Coalition, Advocates for the Homeless and the Frederick Community Action Agency. <u>TransIT</u> was selected for the second year in a row by the Transportation Association of Maryland as the Best Large Fixed Route System in the state. TransIT Driver Ray Milburn was selected as Maryland's Paratransit Driver of the Year.
- <u>Citizens Care and Rehabilitation Center</u> and <u>Montevue Assisted Living</u> moved into their new 156,000 square foot, state-of-the-art facility in spring 2012. State-of-the-art electronic medical records software was implemented; the short-term rehabilitation program now includes geriatric enhanced modalities, and focus is on developing the respiratory care unit and other enhancements to the memory care unit.

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- <u>Public Safety</u> <u>Emergency Management</u>: The Emergency Communications Department (9-1-1 Center) took in over 247,000 calls; the Frederick Police Department dispatch operations united with other dispatchers in the 9-1-1 Center; Frederick County became the first county in Maryland to be able to receive text messages to 9-1-1 in cooperation with Verizon and the MD Emergency Numbers Systems Board.
- A report from <u>Frederick County Public Libraries</u>: circulation of books increased in FY2013, library visits (1,105,952), total patrons served (158,708) and Summer Reading Program participants (10,013).
- <u>Municipalities</u>: Working with synergies in locating cost efficiencies and savings through mutual partnerships such as the elimination of charging local governments for their tax billings and working through tax set-offs and tax differentials, which was a \$4 million budget enhancement to Frederick County municipalities. Reopened Municipal Recycling Centers with county subsidy in Emmitsburg, Middletown, Thurmont and Walkersville.
- Rosemont Water System Solution: A county-structured solution provided several benefits to the residents of Rosemont and ended a legal dispute between the City of Brunswick and the Village of Rosemont. The county project replaced approximately 8,000 feet of old deteriorating water main with new eight-inch Ductile Iron pipe. The project included the installation of 18 new fire hydrants, bringing much needed fire protection to the Village of Rosemont. The county secured a \$1.5 million grant and \$0.3 million low interest rate loan for the project, which helped ensure that the Rosemont customer's cost for water would not significantly change.
- The Frederick County Renewable Waste-to-Energy Facility planned for the McKinney Industrial Park will be able process 1,500 tons of trash per day (in addition to other items), as well as generate up to 51 megawatts of Tier 1 renewable electricity enough to power about 45,000 homes. The report also covered other related projects underway and waste-to-energy project cost information. Once Maryland Department of the Environment permits are received, the County Commissioners will be briefed on final costs and revenues associated with the project.
- Roads and bridges With 1,272 centerline miles, Frederick County has 219 bridges (over 20 foot span), and road, bridge and highway projects remain a priority. Division of Public Works staff continues to work through public-private partnerships for infrastructure improvements.

For further information on the state of the county report, contact Ragen Cherney, Office of the County Manager, at 301-600-1049 or via e-mail at <a href="mailto:rcherney@FrederickCountyMD.gov">rcherney@FrederickCountyMD.gov</a>.